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TRIBAL FEATURES

DEFINITION AND NOMENCLATURE

According to Mashém and the clanmother known as Juana Maria, the proper name of the tribe known as Seri is *Kunkáak* (the first vowel obscure and the succeeding consonant nasalized; perhaps *K*ⁿ-*káak* or *K*ⁿ-*káak* would better express the sound). According to Kolusio, as rendered by M. Pinart, the Seri term for people or nation is *kun-kak*, while the Seri people are designated specifically as *Kwihx*, this designation being practically equivalent phonetically (and doubtless somatically) to Sr Tenochio's general term for women, *kunpkij*. Mashém was unable or unwilling to give the precise signification of the tribal appellation used by him, merely indicating Juana Maria and one or two other elderwomen squatting near as examples or types; but comparison of the elements of the term with those used in other vocables affords a fairly clear inkling as to its meaning. The syllable *kun* (or *k*ⁿ, *kun*, *kom*, etc.) certainly connotes age and woman, and apparently connotes also life or living (*kun-kaic*=an old woman, Metlec; *i-kom* =a wife, *ekom*=alive, Bartlett; *hikkom*=a wife, *kmom-hikmmom*=a married woman, *Yak-kom*=Yaqui tribe, Pinart; *kun-kobrr*=an old woman, Tenochio), the forms being distinct from the word for woman (*kmamm*, Metlec; *ék-e-mam*, Bartlett; *kmom*, Pinart and Tenochio) and widely different from the term for man (*kó-tkmm*, Metlec; *ék-e-tam*, Bartlett; *ktam*, Pinart; *tam*, Tenochio) with its several combining variants; there are also indications in numerous vocables that it connotes person or personality. On the whole, the syllable appears to be an ill-formulated or uncrystallized expression, denoting at once and associatively (1) the state of living or being, (2) personality, (3) age or ancientness (or both), and (4) either femininity or maternity (much more probably the latter), this inchoate condition of the term being quite in accord with other characters of the Seri tongue, and frequently paralleled among other primitive languages. The syllable *kauk* (or *kak*, and probably *kuk*, *kuj*, *kuick*, etc.) would seem to be a still more vague and colloidal term, despite the fact that it is used separately to designate the fire-drill. There are fairly decisive indications that it is composite, the initial portion denoting place and the final portion perhaps more vaguely connoting class or kind with an implication of excellence, both elements appearing in various vocables (too numerous to quote). On the whole, *kauk* would appear to be a typical egocentric or ethnocentric term, designating and dignifying Person, Place, Time,

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101 and Mode, after the manner characteristic of primitive thought;[1] so
196 that it may perhaps be translated "Our-Great-(or Strong-)Kind-Now-Here". The combination of the two syllables affords a characteristically colloidal connotation of concepts, common enough in primitive use, but not expressible by any single term of modern language; in a descriptive way the complete term might be interpreted as "Our-Living-Ancient-Strongkind-Elderwomen-Now-Here," while with the utmost elision the interpretation could hardly be reduced beyond "Our-Great-Motherfolk-Here" without fatal loss of original signification. It should be noted that the designation is made to cover the animals of Seriland (at least the zoic tutelaries of the tribe) and fire as well as the human folk.

101 562 The proper tribe name is of no small interest as an index to primitive thought, and as an illustration of an early stage in linguistic development. It is significant, too, as an expression of the matronymic organization, and of the leading role played by the clanmothers in the simple legislative and judicative affairs of the tribe; and it is especially significant as an indication of the intimate association of fire and life in primitive thought.

101 The designation "Seri", with its several variants, is undoubtedly an alien appellation, and neither Mashém nor Kolusio could throw light on its origin or meaning, though they did not apparently regard it as opprobrious. Peñafiel describes it as an Opata term; and Pimentel's Opata vocabulary[2] (extracted from the grammar and dictionary compiled by Padre Natal Lombardo) indicates its meaning satisfactorily, albeit without special reference to the tribe. The key term in this vocabulary is "*Sererài*, velocidad de la persoña que corre." The accent over the first vowel serves to indicate prolongation, so that term and definition may be rendered, literally, *se-ererài*, speed of the person who runs. Analysis of the term shows that the essential factor or root is that introduced elsewhere in the same vocabulary as "*Ere*, llegar." Now, "llegar" is a protean and undifferentiated Spanish verb neuter, without satisfactory English equivalent; it may be interpreted as arrive, reach, attain, fetch, endure, continue, accomplish, suffice, ascend, or mount to, while as a verb active and verb reflective its equivalents are approach, join, proceed a little distance, unite, etc; it may be said to imply movement or process with a centripetal connotation—i. e., a connotation antithetic to that of the expressive irregular verb "ir" in its protean forms, including the ubiquitous and ever present "vamos" (an American slang equivalent of the Castilian verb "llegar" in certain of its phases is the strong interjectory phrase, "get together"). The prefix *se* is merely an intensive, running not merely through the Opata, but throughout various tongues of the Piman stock. In his extensive vocabulary of the Pima and Papago Indians of Arizona (1871),[3] Captain

[1] Cf. The Beginning of Mathematics, in the American Anthropologist, new series, vol. I, 1899, p. 661.
[2] Vocabulario Manual de la Lengua Opata, por Francisco Pimentel, Boletin de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografia y Estadística, tomo V, 1861, pp. 307-313.
[3] In the archives of the Bureau of American Ethnology.